DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 474 766 TM 033 276

AUTHOR Thurlow, Martha L.; Thompson, Sandra J.; Walz, Lynn; Shin, Hyeonsook

TITLE Student Perspectives on Using Accommodations during Statewide Testing.

PUB DATE 2001-04-13

NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Seattle, WA, April 10-14, 2001). Based on a report by Sandra Thompson, Martha Thurlow, and Lynn Walz, which was supported, in part, by a grant (#R279A50011) to the Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement.

PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.

DESCRIPTORS *Academic Accommodations (Disabilities); Achievement Tests; Graduation Requirements; *High School Students; High Schools; Interviews; *Learning Disabilities; Participation; Special Education; State Programs; State Standards; *Student Attitudes; *Testing Programs

IDENTIFIERS Minnesota

ABSTRACT

Ninety-six high school students from school districts across Minnesota who received special education services for learning disabilities or mild cognitive impairments agreed to participate in an interview on their participation and accommodation use on Minnesota's Basic Standards tests, minimum competency tests in Mathematics, Reading, and Writing required for high school graduation. Interviews took place at a day-long conference on transition planning and self-advocacy for high school students with disabilities from across Minnesota. Students' responses to questions about the tests and their use of accommodations indicated that most students were well aware of their status on large scale assessments and of the accommodations that they need. Older students were more likely to use assessment accommodations than were younger students, and most students used one to three accommodations. Two-thirds of the students interviewed were able to identify the accommodations that they would need in the future, either in postsecondary education or in a career. Female students less often identified needed future accommodations than did male students. Implications for practice and future research are discussed. (Contains 7 tables and 27 references.) (SLD)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 474 766

Student Perspectives on Using Accommodations During Statewide Testing

Martha L. Thurlow, Sandra J. Thompson,
National Center on Educational Outcomes
University of Minnesota

Lynn Walz
Eastern Illinois University

Hyeonsook Shin
Seoul, Korea

350 Elliott Hall
75 East River Road
Minneapolis, MN 55455
THURL001@tc.umn.edu

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

M. Thurlow

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

April 13, 2001

TM033276

Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Seattle, Washington, This paper is based on a report developed by Sandra Thompson, Martha Thurlow, and Lynn Walz, the preparation of which was supported, in part, by the a grant (#R279A50011) to the Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement. Points of view or opinions expressed in the paper are not necessarily those of the U.S. Department of Education or offices within it, nor of the Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Participation and Accommodation Use on High Stakes State Assessments: The Student Perspective

Abstract

Ninety-six high school students from school districts across Minnesota who received special education services for learning disabilities or mild cognitive impairments agreed to participate in an interview on their participation and accommodation use on Minnesota's Basic Standards tests, minimum competency tests in Math, Reading, and Writing required for high school graduation. Interviews took place at a day-long conference on transition planning and self advocacy for high school students with disabilities from across the state of Minnesota. Students' responses to questions about the tests and their use of accommodations indicated that most students were well aware of their status on large scale assessments and of the accommodations that they need. Older students were more likely to use assessment accommodations than were younger students, and most students used one to three accommodations. Two-thirds of the students interviewed were able to identify accommodations that they would need in the future, either in post-secondary education or in a career; female students less often identified needed future accommodations than did male students. Implications for practice and future research are discussed.

The 1997 reauthorization of IDEA requires students with disabilities to be included in statewide and district-wide assessments, *with appropriate accommodations where necessary*. Participation of students with disabilities in large-scale assessments is critical to ensure that schools and other educational systems are held accountable for the educational performance of these students and to obtain a representative, accurate understanding of overall student performance. Federal legislation, such as Goals 2000, the Improving America's School Act (IASA), and the 1997 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), require all students, including those with disabilities, to be included in all large-scale assessment programs by taking general assessments with or without accommodations, or by participating in alternate assessments.

IEP teams make decisions about how students will participate in large-scale assessments. According to IDEA, students who are planning for the important transition from school to adult life must be invited to attend their IEP team meetings, and their interests and preferences must be considered in the development of their transition plans. As team participants, students with disabilities need to have an active and informed role in making decisions about the use of accommodations for tests, for instruction, and for their future adult lives.

Accommodations Research Findings

Currently, every state has a policy governing the use of accommodations on large-scale assessments (Thurlow, House, Boys, Scott, & Ysseldyke, 2000). These policies vary widely across states, which may account partially for the wide range in both the number of students using accommodations and the variety of accommodations selected (Thompson & Thurlow, 1999). Some states allow the use of test accommodations only for students with disabilities and 504 accommodation plans, while others encourage the use of accommodations for any student who needs them. While the specific accommodations listed by states has continued to increase over time, Thurlow et al. (2000) noted the tendency of many states to list as "accommodations"

things that might be more appropriately considered to be good test-taking practice (e.g., use of pencil grips or well-sharpened pencils; facing the front of the room).

Assessment accommodations are defined by Schulte, Elliott, and Kratochwill (2000) as "any change in an assessment that is intended to maintain or facilitate the measurement goals of the assessment so scores from the accommodated test measure the same attributes as scores from the unaccommodated test" (p. 2). Researchers argue that accommodations should raise or "boost" performance of students who need them, and not affect the performance of students who do not need them (Fuchs, Fuchs, Eaton, Hamlett, & Karns, 2000; Tindal, Helwig, & Hollenbeck, 1999).

The National Research Council's (1998) report on high stakes testing identifies issues and recommendations on participation and accommodations for students with disabilities. It recognizes that testing accommodations should be offered to increase the participation of students with disabilities in large-scale assessments and to obtain valid information about student performance. The report suggests that decisions about how students with disabilities participate in large-scale assessments (particularly when the stakes are high) be guided by systematic and objective criteria.

There are an increasing number of empirical studies about the use of testing accommodations (Bielinski, Ysseldyke, Bolt, Friedebach, & Friedebach, in press; Elliott, Bielinski, Thurlow, DeVito, & Hedlund, 1999; Trimble, 1998) and about their effects (Thurlow, Hurley, Spicuzza, Erickson, & El Sawaf,1996; Thurlow, Ysseldyke, & Silverstein, 1995; Tindal & Fuchs, 2000). This increase is partially due to policy and the increasing use of high stakes assessments in many states. In addition, federal funds have begun to be directed toward the use and effects of testing accommodations. (Erickson, Thurlow, & Ysseldyke, 1996). There is also research that addresses IEP team decisions about accommodations.

Role of the IEP Team in the Selection and Use of Assessment Accommodations

IEP teams have the authority to select accommodations for students with disabilities (Heumann & Warlich, 2000). A study by Fuchs, Fuchs, Eaton, Hamlett, and Karns (2000) found that IEP teams often offer students too many accommodations, "crossing their fingers" that *something* will help, and then finding few, if any, increases in assessment performance. Similarly, Hollenbeck, Tindal and Almond (1998) found a great deal of variability in the perceptions of teachers about appropriate assessment accommodations.

Although IEP teams select the assessment accommodations for individual students, many states provide a list of accommodations to help IEP teams in this selection. Some states post this list on Web sites or on the IEP form itself (Thompson, Thurlow, Quenemoen, Esler & Whetstone, 2001). Less often evident on the forms is the possible consequences of the use of certain accommodations, especially those that may jeopardize test validity (e.g., scores do not count for graduation if the accommodation is used, etc.).

Minnesota's Basic Standards Tests

Minnesota requires students to pass basic skills tests in Reading, Writing, and Math to graduate from high school. Basic Standards Tests in Reading and Math are first administered to students in eighth grade. Students who entered ninth grade in the1996-1997 school year (anticipated graduating class of 2000) were required to pass Basic Standards Tests in Reading and Math to be eligible for graduation. The graduating class of 2000 was required to respond to

70% of the test items accurately to pass the tests. Graduates in 2001 are required to achieve 75% accuracy. Students may retake the Basic Standards Tests at least twice annually until a passing level is achieved. A test in Written Composition is administered to students beginning in tenth grade.

Students with IEPs or Section 504 accommodation plans are eligible for accommodations on the Basic Standards Tests in Reading, Math, and Written Composition. In the state guidelines, a testing accommodation is defined as an adjustment in testing conditions or a change in the method of administering the test that does not:

- Alter the validity or reliability of the state standard
- Compromise the security or the confidentiality of the tests
- Render the student's score incomparable to the scores of those students who took the tests under standard conditions.

In Minnesota, decisions about appropriate testing accommodations for students with disabilities are made and annually reviewed by the IEP or 504 team and documented on each student's IEP or 504 accommodation plan. Accommodations on the Basic Standards Tests typically fall into four categories – presentation format, test setting, scheduling or timing, and response format.

Decisions about the accommodations or modifications students use during testing affect notations on their progress records. Students who either take the state tests as generally administered or with accommodations as needed receive a standard diploma and a notation that they passed at the "state level." Students who take a modified version of the tests (e.g., by using a non-approved testing change, called a modification) receive a standard diploma and the notation "pass-individual" on their high school transcript.

Participation of students with disabilities on Minnesota's Basic Standards Tests is high, about 90% in 1998 and 1999. Still, overall performance lags far below that of students without disabilities, averaging about 25% passing compared to 75% for students without disabilities (Thompson, Thurlow, & Spicuzza, 2000).

Role of the Student in the Selection and Use of Assessment Accommodations

Educators, and more recently, IEP teams have the responsibility of making educational decisions for students. We are now moving into what Bersani (1995) referred to as the "third wave" in the disability movement, in which consumers of special education services are invited to the table as self-advocates. In the past, if a student did not attend his or her IEP team meeting, decisions about assessment accommodations were likely to be made without his or her input, with the assumption that whatever decision was made would be followed without question by the student. Common sense is beginning to prevail as people realize that, disability or not, adolescents seldom follow directions without question, especially when they might "stand out" from their peers (Kaiser & Abell, 1997). According to Lichtenstein (1998), "the search for independence and the struggle for autonomy" (p. 9) is at the top of the list of major changes for adolescents.

Focusing on the role of the student in the selection and use of assessment accommodations is critical. In a study about the use of assessment accommodations by students with limited English proficiency, Liu, Anderson, Swierzbin and Thurlow (1999) found that the actual use of

assessment accommodations varied greatly depending on the student and what he or she was comfortable using. It is not enough to have students simply attend their IEP meetings and listen to others make decisions about them; teachers and parents need to take an active role in preparing students for their participation in state and district assessments. Some students have had limited experience in expressing personal preferences and advocating for themselves. Speaking out about their preferences, particularly in the presence of "authority figures," may be a new role for students, one for which they need guidance and feedback. Research has shown that many students with disabilities have limited knowledge of their strengths and weaknesses. (Agran, Snow & Swaner, 1999; Kaiser & Abell, 1997; Martin & Huber Marshall, 1997). According to Field, Hoffman and Posch (1997), "the potential for self-determination is directly proportional to the individual's awareness of his or her strengths, weaknesses, needs, and preferences" (p. 288).

Field and Hoffman (1994) define self-determination as "the ability to identify and achieve goals based on a foundation of knowing and valuing oneself" (p. 164). Another term commonly used is "self-advocacy," which involves making informed decisions and then taking responsibility for those decisions (Van Ruesen, Deshler, & Shumaker, 1989). Winnelle Carpenter, a self-advocate and accommodations consultant from Minnesota, describes the process of self advocacy as follows:

> For students with disabilities to self advocate effectively, they must understand their specific disability; learn their strengths and challenges; identify factors that are interfering with their performance, learning, and employment; and develop compensations, accommodations and coping skills to help them succeed. In addition, through careful guidance, these same students must learn how to apply this knowledge effectively when making decisions, negotiating and speaking up on their own behalf. (Carpenter, p. iv, 1996)

The goal is for students to assume control, with appropriate levels of support, over their assessment participation and select and use accommodations that are most helpful to them, both in the assessment, and throughout their daily lives.

In this study, we interviewed 96 high school students with disabilities about their participation in a large-scale statewide test that they must pass in order to graduate from high school with the standard notation that they passed at the state level. We wanted to know whether they had participated in the statewide assessments and whether they had passed tests in Reading, Math, and Writing. We also asked the students what accommodations they used for statewide testing, in their daily classes, and what accommodations they thought might be most helpful to them in the future. This paper presents the results of the study from the student perspective, along with recommendations for future research and practice.

Method

Participants and Setting

Interviews for this study took place at a day-long conference on transition planning and self advocacy for high school students with disabilities from across the state of Minnesota. The "Minnesota Mind Movers" conference was held in conjunction with the International Conference on Learning Disabilities. The purpose of the conference was to increase the self-advocacy, transition and leadership skills of high school age students with learning and attention challenges. About 300 students with a variety of abilities and disabilities from grades 9-12 attended the conference that took place in Minneapolis in October 1999. Arrangements to conduct the study

were made collaboratively between the University of Minnesota, the Minnesota Department of Children, Families, and Learning, and Family Service Inc. of St. Paul.

Instrumentation and Procedures

Flyers posted in several locations at the conference informed the students of the opportunity to participate anonymously in a research project. Interested students were interviewed during breaks between conference sessions.

Individual students were invited to approach one of the ten interviewers who were seated in different locations in a commons area. Interviewers included researchers and graduate students from the National Center on Educational Outcomes at the University of Minnesota and high school special education teachers and consultants. The study and intent of the research were explained to each potential participant, and permission was secured before the interview began. Following the interview, each student received a small gift (transition planning guide, restaurant gift certificate and multi-colored highlighter) in appreciation of his or her participation.

Data were collected through a self-reporting interview. Questions were asked orally, with no reading skills required to respond. Students were asked how many times they had taken Minnesota's Basic Standards Tests in Reading, Math and Writing and whether they had passed each test. Next, the students were asked whether they had used accommodations on any of the tests, and, if so, which ones. A list of accommodations across the categories used in Minnesota (presentation, response, time or setting) was available for students. Additional survey questions asked students to identify accommodations they used in class and how they might continue to use these accommodations in their future adult lives. (See Appendix A for survey protocol.) Students were the only respondents. Responses were not verified by parents, teachers, or any other adult chaperones, or matched to actual test results.

Results

Ninety-six high school students from school districts across Minnesota agreed to participate in the study. Most the students were in grades 10–12 (Gr 9 n = 10; Gr 10 n = 22; Gr 11 n = 35; Gr 12 n = 29) and ages 15-18 (14 yrs n = 8; 15 yrs n = 16; 16 yrs n = 20; 17 yrs n = 29; 18 yrs n = 18; 19 yrs or older n = 5). Thirty-nine (41%) of the participants were girls and 57 (59%) were boys. All of the participants received special education services; students were not asked to disclose their primary disability. It was assumed that most of the conference attendees had learning disabilities or mild cognitive impairments.

Participation and Performance

Seventy-five students, approximately three-fourths of the survey respondents, indicated that they had taken at least one of Minnesota's Basic Standards Tests. Students who reported that they had not taken the tests (n = 12) or did not know whether they had participated in testing (n = 9) were distributed fairly evenly across grades (see Table 1). One student was too young to participate in testing and one had recently moved to Minnesota from another state.

Table 1. Test Participation Status By Grade

Response (n = 96)	Grade 9	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12+
Took at least one Basic Standards Test	80%	82%	75%	80%
Did not take any Basic Standards Tests	20%	9%	14%	10%
Do not know	0%	9%	11%	10%
Total Number of Students	19	22	35	29

Testing sessions are offered in the winter and summer, and students can retake tests during each session until they pass. Table 2 shows the number of times students reported taking each of the tests. Over 80% of the students interviewed reported taking each test one or two times. Four students reported taking the Math test four to six times and four students reported taking the Reading test four or five times. About half of the students had not yet taken the Writing test, which is only offered to students beginning in 10th grade.

Table 2. Number of Students Reporting Multiple Times Taking BSTs

BST Content	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Reading	0	34	28	9	2	2	0
Math	0	39	22	10	2	1	1
Writing	37	28	9	1	0	0	0

Note: These data are from the 75 students who knew they had taken the BSTs at least once.

Fifty-six percent of the students who took the Basic Standards Reading test at least once said that they had passed. A smaller number of students (45%) reported passing the Math test, and 21% of the Writing test participants reported passing (see Table 3).

Table 3. Passing Rates Reported by Test Participants

Passed Test?	Reading	Math	Writing
Yes	56%	45%	55%
No	40%	48%	24%
Don't Know	4%	7%	21%

Note: These data are based on the 75 students who reported taking the Reading and Math tests, and the 37 students who reported taking the Writing test.

Assessment Accommodations

About 75% of the students who participated in at least one Basic Standards Test reported using accommodations on the tests. Only two assessment participants said that they did not know whether they used an accommodation. Table 4 shows that a greater percentage of students age 17 and older reported using accommodations (84%) than students age 16 and younger (65%). Test accommodation use was fairly evenly distributed among males and females. Forty-one students (55% of those tested) used one, two, or three assessment accommodations on the Basic Standards Tests (25% used 0 accommodations, 23% used 1, 16% used 2, 16% used 3, 3% used 4, 8% used 5, and 9% used 6 or more accommodations).

Table 4. Test Accommodation Use by Age

Accommodations Use	14-15 Years	16 Years	17 Years	18+ Years
Used test accommodations	70%	59%	86%	82%
Did not use test accommodations	30%	41%	5%	18%
Don't know	0	0	9%	0

Note: Percentages are based on 20 14-15-yr-olds, 17 16-yr-olds, 21 17-yr-olds, and 17 18+-yr-olds.

Table 5 is a list of assessment accommodations students reported using during the BSTs. The accommodations used by at least a quarter of these students included extended time, testing in a separate room in a small group, having directions repeated, and reviewing test directions in advance.

Table 5. Percentages of Students Using Specific Assessment Accommodations

Accommodation	% Using	Accommodation	% Using
Extended time	39%	Tested different time of day	8%
Small group in separate room	39%	Large print test booklet	5%
Directions repeated	32%	Template to reduce visual field	5%
Directions in advance	27%	Special setting	5%
Math test read aloud	16%	Audio cassette and headphones for math	4%
Tested alone in separate room	12%	Directions amplified	1%
Directions written in test booklet	9%	Additional answer pages	1%
Short segment test booklet	8%		

Note: Percentages are based on 75 students.

An analysis of the test performance of students who reported using accommodations showed that the same number of students who passed the Math test used accommodations (n = 26) as the number who did not pass the Math test (n = 26). Of the 56 students who used accommodations on the Reading test, 30 passed and 23 did not pass. Similarly, a greater number of students who passed the Writing test used accommodations (n =17) than those who did not pass (n = 7) (see Table 6).

Table 6. Test Performance of Students Who Used Accommodations

Test	Passed	Not Passed	Don't Know
Reading - Used accommodations	30	23	3
Reading - No accommodations	11	6	0
Reading - Don't know	1	1	0
Math - Used accommodations	26	26	4
Math - No accommodations	8	8	1
Math - Don't know	0	2	0
Writing - Used accommodations	17	7	1
Writing - No accommodations	3	2	6
Writing - Don't know	1	1	0

Classroom Accommodations

Several of the accommodations students used for assessments were also used in daily classroom activities. The most common of these included extended time, working in a small group or in a separate room, having tests read aloud, and having directions repeated.

In addition to the assessment accommodations students reported using in the classroom, additional classroom assessment accommodations were identified:

- Books on tape (3 students)
- Reduced reading (4 students)
- Larger screen on the computer (1 student)
- Noise buffer (1 student)
- Copy notes from students or copy lecture notes (6 students)
- Use a notetaker (3 students)
- Oral test taking (1 student)

Students also identified a variety of teaching, learning, and organizational strategies that they found useful in the classroom. Whether these are viewed as accommodations specific to a student with disabilities or common learning strategies may vary, depending on the student, setting, and situation:

- Work in a small group; cooperative learning; study partners; peer tutors (15 students)
- Copy notes and/or directions from board or overheads (14 students)
- Review and practice, "Go over material until it sticks in your head" (9 students)
- Clear instructions, with examples (9 students)
- Take notes (7 students)
- Set goals (6 students)
- Keep an assignment notebook (5 students)
- Open book tests (5 students)
- Study guides (4 students)
- Sit in the front of the classroom, near the teacher, or close to the board (3 students)
- Hands-on, experiential learning (3 students)
- Visual cues; movies (3 students)
- Use a calculator (2 students)
- Have an extra book to take home (2 students)
- Memory devices (1 student)
- Structured routine (1 student)
- "When they actually teach instead of just giving us the book!" (1 student)

Several students talked about the usefulness of individual instruction:

- Tutoring and individualized instruction from teachers (10 students)
- Someone who can help me with reading; with assignments; explaining homework and big words; with basic skills; (6 students)
- Asking questions; asking for help when needed (4 students)

Future Accommodations

When asked what accommodations students thought would be most helpful for them in the future, about a third of them did not know, or thought they probably would not need accommodations in the future. Table 7 shows these responses by grade and gender. Students in 11th grade were the least sure about what they might need in the future. Female students less often identified accommodations for the future than did male students.

Table 7. Use of Accommodations in the Future, by Grade and Gender

	Grade Level				Gender	
Response	**7-9**	**10**	**11**	**12+**	**Male**	**Female**
Identified Accommodations	80%	73%	63%	76%	81%	56%
None or Don't Know	20%	27%	37%	24%	19%	44%

Some students responded that they plan to use the same accommodations in the future as they currently use on assessments and in the classroom. The specific accommodations identified were: small group in a separate room (16%), extended time (15%), directions repeated (9%), tests read aloud (9%), alone in a separate room (5%), large print (2%), directions in advance (1%), audio cassette (1%), and different time of day (1%). [These percentages are based on all 96 respondents.]

Students identified many additional accommodations and learning strategies that they planned to use in their future adult lives; those identified by two or more students were: Oral directions (n = 5), Written directions (n = 4), Review often (n = 4), Take notes (n = 4), Hands-on learning and demonstration of knowledge (n = 3), Notetaker (n = 3), Someone to learn with, study buddy (n = 3), Simplify, repeat directions (n = 2), Ask for things on board, overhead and handout sheets (n = 2), Use study guides (n = 2), and Work alone (n = 2). Several students also identified needs for help and support. For example, seven students identified the need for another person to help (e.g., tutor, someone to help me if I have trouble, one on one teaching, help with reading and spelling, teacher or counselor to go to). Three students identified the need for greater explanation (e.g., of terms, of expectations for assignments), and three identified the need for support (e.g., from peers, friends).

Discussion

The results of this study showed that nearly all students interviewed knew what tests we were talking about and seemed to understand the importance of passing the tests. Most students also knew how many times they had taken each test and whether they had passed. Further, about 75% of the students said that they had used assessment accommodations; only two students did not know what accommodations were. Older students were more likely to use assessment accommodations than younger students, and the majority of students used three or fewer accommodations. Extended time, testing in a separate room in a small group, having directions repeated, and reviewing test directions in advance were the accommodations used most often.

Students who said they used assessment accommodations, and students who said they did not, reported passing the Math test at the same rates. Students using accommodations for the Reading and Writing tests more often reporting passing that did students who did not use accommodations.

Several of the accommodations students used for assessments were also used in daily classroom activities. These most commonly included extended time, working in a small group or in a separate room, having tests read aloud, and having directions repeated. Additional classroom accommodations students identified that would not be conducive to assessment situations included books on tape, reduced reading, note-taker, copy notes and/or directions from chalkboard or overheads. One student said, "Sit by a smart person" and there were similar comments in favor of "study buddies" and other cooperative learning strategies.

About two thirds of the students interviewed were able to identify accommodations that would be helpful to them in their future adult lives. The other third either did not know what would be helpful, or thought they probably would not need accommodations in the future. Female students less often identified accommodations for the future than did male students. Some students responded that they plan to use the same accommodations in the future that they currently use on assessments and in the classroom. Students identified a variety of additional accommodations and learning strategies that they planned to use in their future adult lives, including: ask for directions to be written down or given orally, simplify and repeat directions, demonstrate what is expected, get a notetaker in college, ask for notes to be written on a chalkboard, overhead or handout sheets, tape record lectures and instructions, and break tasks into smaller parts.

Recommendations for Research

The results of this study support the importance and need for research that addresses the perceptions and opinions of students, who indeed face the greatest consequences as a result of participation in high stakes assessments. The research that we conducted still must be considered preliminary. Despite the importance of talking to students, our study was limited to the extent that the students did not understand the questions or were unwilling to respond accurately. Because we conducted the interviews in the fall, and tests were given the preceding winter and summer, it is also possible that some students' ability to remember accurately was reduced. Furthermore, it is important to recognize that we simply asked students whether they had "passed" the tests. In Minnesota, students with IEPs may be allowed to "pass" at a lower score or with a modified test. We did not ask students whether their tests had been modified. Because the interview was not a "test" to see what students knew, but rather was designed to ask about perceptions and opinions, we did not verify responses with teachers, parents, or actual test data. In addition, because of the conference setting in which interviews were conducted, it is possible that some interviewers gave more cues and examples than others.

Future research needs to address questions about participation and accommodation decisions made by the IEP team, how those decisions are carried out in the classroom, how students learn about and select assessment accommodations, how they advocate for the use of accommodations in actual assessment situations, what students think will improve test performance, and transferring the use of classroom and assessment accommodations to plans for the transition to adult life.

Research should also be conducted to find out why some students are not tested. In addition to counting the number of students tested, students themselves should be asked about their participation and what motivates them to do their best. Research should look at the use of test modifications, and what happens to those scores both at the system and student levels.

Recommendations for Practice

It is important for students to understand the purpose of each assessment they take and the use and consequences of the scores. Building knowledge of strengths and limitations, self-advocacy skills and strategies for learning in students should be paramount for all students, regardless of whether they receive special education services. Students need to be able to say, as one survey participant responded, "I have somewhat of a disability." Students need many opportunities to attain this knowledge and skill throughout their school years.

Students listed several learning strategies in addition to assessment accommodations. These strategies can be useful to a variety of students with particular learning styles, regardless of the presence of an identified disability. For example, having directions for an assignment written on a chalkboard or overhead is a useful accommodation, but on a broader level, is a helpful instructional strategy for all students. Some common teaching and learning strategies become specific accommodations in situations where they are only allowed for students with disabilities. For example, in some classrooms, any student can choose to sit near the front of the room, while in others, students may be seated in a specific order (e.g., alphabetical) and a special request then must be made for preferential seating. Students talked about the helpfulness of open book tests. Again, this is an accommodation only to the extent that it is not allowed for all students. Students also talked about learning strategies that played to their strongest learning styles such as hands-on, experiential learning, demonstrations, and visual cues. The fact that these came up during discussions about accommodations suggests that regular classroom practice may not always be very accommodating.

The purpose of using accommodations is to give students an opportunity to show what they know and can do without the effects of a disability. This purpose transcends assessments and classroom activities to each student's post-school education, career and community life. When asked what accommodations students thought would be most helpful for them in the future, about a third of them did not know, or thought they probably would not need any. By the time students are juniors and seniors, they should be well aware of what helps them learn and what helps level the playing field. They should have several discussions about how to continue to use their knowledge and skills as they make the transition to post secondary education or post-school careers.

This study powerfully demonstrates that valid and reliable accommodations research can and must be conducted with students themselves – not only as subjects, but also as important participants in interviews. Doing so will enlighten the field not only about accommodations, but probably also about instruction. As one student stated when asked what would be most helpful in a classroom setting: "When they actually teach instead of just giving us the book!" While many educators have become distracted from the gist of education reform by the flurry of assessments and discussions of accommodations that surround the inclusion of students with disabilities, this student has captured the essence of education reform in a simple sentence!

References

Agran, M., Snow, K., & Swaner, J. (1999). Teacher perceptions of self-determination: benefits, characteristics, strategies. Education and Training in Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, 34(3), 293-301.

Bersani, H. (1995, Summer). Leadership: Where we've been, where we are, where we are going. Institute on Community Integration IMPACT, 8(3), 2-3.

Bielinski, J., Ysseldyke, J.E., Bolt, S., Friedebach, M., & Friedebach, J. (in press) Prevalence of accommodations for students with disabilities participating in a statewide testing program. Diagnostique.

Carpenter, W.D. (1995). Become your own expert: Self-advocacy curriculum for individuals with learning disabilities. St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Department of Education.

Elliott, J., Bielinski, J., Thurlow, M., DeVito, P., & Hedlund, E. (1999). Accommodations and the Performance of All Students on Rhode Island's Performance Assessment (Rhode Island Report 1). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, National Center on Education Outcomes.

Field, S., & Hoffman, A. (1994). Development of a model for self-determination. Career Development for Exceptional Individuals, 17, 159-169.

Field, S., Hoffman, A., & Posch, M. (1997). Self-determination during adolescence: A developmental perspective. Remedial and Special Education, 18(5), 285-293.

Fuchs, L.S., Fuchs, D., Eaton, S.B., Hamlett, C., & Karns, K. (2000). Supplementing teacher judgments about test accommodations with objective data sources. School Psychology Review, 29 (1), 65-85.

Hollenbeck, K., Tindal, G., & Almond, P. Teachers knowledge of accommodations as a validity issue in high-stakes testing. The Journal of Special Education, 32(3) 175-183.

Heumann, J.E., & Warlick, K.R. (2000, August 24). Questions and answers about provisions in the Individuals with Disabilities education Act Amendments of 1997 related to students with disabilities and state and district-wide assessments (Memorandum to state Directions of special Education, OSEP 00-24). Washington, DC: Office of Special Education Programs.

Kaiser, D., & Abell, M. (1997). Learning life management in the classroom. *Teaching Exceptional Children,* 30(1), 70-75.

Lichtenstein, S. (1998). Characteristics of youth and young adults. In R. Rusch & J. Chadsey (Eds) Beyond high school: Transition from school to work. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company.

Liu, K., Anderson, M., Swierzbin, B., & Thurlow, M. (1999). Bilingual accommodations for limited English proficient students on statewide Reading tests (Minnesota Report 20). University of Minnesota: National Center on Educational Outcomes.

Martin, L.E., & Huber Marshall, L. (1997). Choice making: Description of a model project. In M. Agran (Ed.), Student-directed learning: Teaching self-determination skills. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.

National Research Council (1998). High stakes testing for tracking, promotion, and graduation. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

Schulte, A., Elliott, S. & Kratochowill, T. R. (2000). Experimental analysis of the effects of testing accommodations on students' standardized Math test scores. Paper presented at the annual conference of The Chief Council of State School Officers, Snowbird, Utah.

Thompson, S.J. & Thurlow, M.L. (1999). 1999 State special education outcomes: A report on state activities at the end of the century. Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota, National Center on Educational Outcomes.

Thompson, S.J., Thurlow, M.L., Quenemoen, R.F., Esler, A., & Whetstone, P. (2001). Addressing standards and assessments on state IEP forms (Synthesis Report 38). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, National Center on Educational Outcomes.

Thompson, S.J., Thurlow, M.L., & Spicuzza, R. (2000). 1999 report on the participation and performance of students with disabilities on Minnesota's Basic Standards Tests (Minnesota Report 29). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, National Center on Educational Outcomes.

Thurlow, M., House, A., Boys, C., Scott, D., & Ysseldyke, J. (2000). State participation and accommodation policies for students with disabilities: 1999 update (Synthesis Report 33). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, National Center on Education Outcomes.

Thurlow, M., Hurley, C., Spicuzza, R., and El Sawaf, H. (1996). A review of the literature on testing accommodations for students with disabilities (Minnesota Report 9). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, National Center on Education Outcomes.

Thurlow, M. L., Ysseldyke, J. E., & Silverstein, B. (1995). Testing accommodations for students with disabilities: A review of the literature. Minneapolis: National Center on Educational Outcomes, University of Minnesota.

Tindal, G. & Fuchs, L. (2000). A summary of research on test changes: An empirical basis for defining accommodations. Lexington, KY: Mid-South Regional Resource Center.

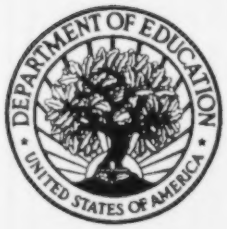
Tindal, G., Helwig, R., & Hollenbeck, K. (1999). An update on test accommodations: Perspectives of practice and policy. Journal of Special Education Leadership, 12, 11-20.

Trimble, S. (1998). Performance trends and use of accommodations on a statewide assessment: Students with disabilities in the KIRIS on-demand assessments from 1992-93 through 1995-96 (Maryland/Kentucky Report 3). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, National Center on Education Outcomes.

Van Reusen, A.K., Deshler, D.D., & Schumaker, J.B. (1989). Effects of a student participation strategy in facilitating the involvement of adolescents with learning disabilities in the individualized educational program planning process. Learning Disabilities, 1(2), 23-24.

Wehmeyer, M.L., (1998). Student involvement in transition planning and transition program implementation. In R. Rusch & J. Chadsey (eds) Beyond high school: Transition from school to work. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company.

TM033276



U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

ERIC®

NOTICE

Reproduction Basis

☒ This document is covered by a signed "Reproduction Release (Blanket)" form (on file within the ERIC system), encompassing all or classes of documents from its source organization and, therefore, does not require a "Specific Document" Release form.

☐ This document is Federally-funded, or carries its own permission to reproduce, or is otherwise in the public domain and, therefore, may be reproduced by ERIC without a signed Reproduction Release form (either "Specific Document" or "Blanket").